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Predicting Risk From Pollution Examined at International Symposium

Ann Brown, (919) 541-7818

RESEARCH TRIANGLE PARK, NC -- More than 400 health and ecological scientists from throughout the world will attend the fourth annual international scientific symposium April 27-30, sponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's National Health and Environmental Effects Research Laboratory (NHEERL). The four-day symposium, to be held at the Embassy Suites Hotel and Conference Center in Cary, NC, will focus on integrating health and ecological research to determine risks from exposure to pollutants and other forms of nonchemical stressors.

Thirty-two leading environmental scientists will make presentations on risk assessment research to advance the understanding of the potential hazards from exposure to chemicals and other agents to humans and the environment. Risk assessment is the process of determining what is harmful to humans and the environment and is used as the basis for establishing policy and regulations.

Paul Hawken, best-selling author of the book, *The Ecology of Commerce,* will speak at a banquet from 7-9 p.m. on Tuesday, April 28. Hawken is a businessman and environmentalist who has served on the board of many environmental and corporate organizations. Currently, he serves as chairman of The Natural Step, a non-profit educational foundation that assists business and government leaders throughout the world to make environmental sustainability a core part of business strategy.

At the symposium, scientists will explore key research questions involving risk assessment. Similarities and differences between human and ecological risk assessment will be discussed.

"Historically, communication between health risk and ecological risk researchers has been limited due to perceived differences between humans, plants and animals," said Dr. Wayne Munns, symposium chairman and ecology scientist. "What happens when humans are exposed to potentially harmful chemicals, however, may not be entirely different than what happens with exposure to fish, birds or plants," he explained.

"Scientists at the symposium will have the opportunity to learn from each other to advance the science of determining risk to humans and ecosystems," Munns added. "Every time the environment is impacted by pollution, humans are affected, and visa versa."

The symposium is entitled, "Extrapolation in Human Health and Ecological Risk Assessments," and

will focus on extrapolation techniques -- a common method used by scientists to determine the potential hazards of pollutants to humans and the environment. Extrapolation research involves a process of collecting data from the field or laboratory and making assessments that apply either to larger populations or ecosystems, different species or different time frames. For example, research can involve extrapolating a short-term study to make long-term projections.

A major focus of scientific research at EPA in the Research Triangle Park is the development of methods and tools to determine risks to human health and ecosystems from exposure to pollutants in the air, water and soil. The federal agency's largest research facility is located in the Research Triangle Park.

Note to Reporters: To attend the conference, please contact Ann Brown in Public Affairs at the EPA in the Research Triangle Park, 919-541-7818.

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